

The Loyalty Foundation
September 30, 2018

Part 1

Matthew 22:34-40 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. That sounds a lot like a call to loyalty, reminiscent of the first commandment in Exodus 20, “² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before^[a] me.” This commandment was part of a conditional promise with the people of Israel that if they could be loyal to God, God would grant permission for them to live in the promised land. But if they started worshipping the gods of the inhabitants of the promised land they would be removed from the land.

Haidt writes about the six foundations that define the morality of conservatives and liberals. “Liberals have a three - foundation morality, whereas conservatives use all six. Liberal moral matrices rest on the Care / harm, Liberty / oppression, and Fairness / cheating foundations, although liberals are often willing to trade away fairness (as proportionality) when it conflicts with compassion or with their desire to fight oppression. Conservative morality rests on all six foundations, although conservatives are more willing than liberals to sacrifice Care and let some people get hurt in order to achieve their many other moral objectives.”

Specific to loyalty, Haidt writes, “But Republicans since Nixon have had a near-monopoly on appeals to loyalty (particularly patriotism and military virtues) and authority (including respect for parents, teachers, elders, and the police, as well as for traditions). And after that they embraced Christian conservatives during Ronald Reagan’s 1980 campaign and became the party of “family values.” He also comments on the liberal perspective of loyalty, “As with the Loyalty foundation, it is much easier for the political right to build on this foundation than it is for the left, which often defines itself in part by its opposition to hierarchy, inequality, and power.”

“The original trigger for the Loyalty foundation is anything that tells you who is a team player and who is a traitor, particularly when your team is fighting with other teams.” This is called group loyalty. We had a lock-in with COYO Jr High last weekend. We had 32 students of whom 28 were from Westside Middle School. We made a circle and went around introducing ourselves with our names and what school we go to. As more and more students would say,

“Westside,” there got to be a momentum about it and a definite pride, which took the form of “We’re the best.” When the four who were not from Westside named their schools, there were insulting comments made about those schools. What happened to make the majority group get so revved up and nasty? There is a group loyalty that can be difficult to work with, like the youth group. COYO Sr High is a really close youth group this year and I would call them loyal to each other for the most part. But, that loyalty can make it a closed system, and even though they want to be a welcoming group to new visitors, that connection that they already have makes it hard for others to enter in. I wonder if that is the same for our church as a whole, or any church.

But I think loyalty is a good thing, an expression of love toward someone else. It embodies the word commitment whether the circumstances are good or bad. Loyalty to a group can be a great thing when you stand with a group because of your commitment to their cause. I consider myself a loyal person. But the problem comes when loyalty has a priority over good, right, or just. I was loyal to the last church that I served for 18 years. I stayed so long and probably would have stayed longer because I was loyal to those students and families. But other aspects of the church were actually making me miserable, but my loyalty made me endure. That wasn’t good for my health.

I think we have all seen the way loyalty to a political party, while good in some ways, can also be harmful in many ways. Even this week we have seen evidence of loyalty being held higher than other values. Is this where we rub our bellies?

Something to consider is the UCC slogan, “That they may all be one.” It continues to say, “In essentials – unity. In non-essentials – diversity. In all things – charity.” What if that were the motto of our country’s political cooperation? Charity could be a refreshing approach.

Part 2

Psalm 78:1-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

God’s Goodness and Israel’s Ingratitude

A Maskil of Asaph.

- ¹ Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
- ² I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
- ³ things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.
- ⁴ We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.
- ⁵ He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,

which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children;
⁶ that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children,
⁷ so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
⁸ and that they should not be like their ancestors,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.

There is one kind of loyalty that is there for everyone, no matter if you consider yourself a liberal or a conservative, and that is the desire to raise our kids in the best possible way. There may be different ways to go about that and there may be different values that are emphasized in the process, but we all want our kids to grow up knowing that they are loved, confident in who they are, and enjoying the life that has been given to them.

So here there is a loyalty to our faith and to our children to pass on our faith to the next generation so that they will pass it on to the next and so forth. Countryside has been doing this for many generations with its ministry to children and youth, confirming students who stand before us deciding for themselves to live the faith for themselves. I love being a part of this process here at Countryside and the unique kind of faith that we embrace, that all are loved beyond their wildest imagination and that all are welcome, embracing inclusion. Eric and I talk regularly about how we can help students find their calling, what they were made to do, based on their passions and personalities which have been instilled by God. When I came to Countryside I loved that emphasis on finding your calling, whatever it may be, and embracing the love that God has for us no matter where we are.

One of the best things we have here at Countryside are many volunteers who believe in this principle to pass on this faith to the next generation. We really couldn't do it without them. Our volunteers have found a faith that matters to them that they want to pass on so that faith matters to our students, or young friends as Rebecca puts it. We also have wonderful families that want to pass their faith on to their kids and make choices to have their kids be part of our ministry. Our emphasis this year from the Board of Youth is to connect families more, to help them get to know each other and become friends so that their children will become better friends as well. We have started doing all COYO family dinners every six weeks or so to start this emphasis and in my opinion it has gone very well.

I love providing experiences where students get a glimpse at what faith is about and how much God loves them, where they have an aha moment that will be a foundation for their future. This usually happens on our summer trips and special events where they have the time to listen

and watch God at work in their lives. I love to see our students get together with Tri-Faith youth and watch the excitement that they have to be together.

But, I would say we need to do more to pass on this faith to this next generation. These are challenging times for a declining church culture and a society that distracts people from faith. We are going to need a new model to reach those who we don't see very often. What we offer here is great for those who come, but there are many on our lists who do not come, so how do we make sure that they know that this church loves them? That is our challenge in the coming years and we have the right people here to take it on, people who are loyal to God and loyal to children. I look forward to seeing where this endeavor takes us.